

Review 2

Title: ‘Education, Democracy, and Development. Does education contribute to democratization in developing countries?’ By Clive Harber and Vusi Mncube (2012) Symposium-Books Ltd., Oxford, U. K. 190 pages, U.S. \$48.00. ISBN: 978-1-873927-71-7

Reviewed by: Russell F. Farnen, University of Connecticut (ret.), Professor (emeritus) of Political Science, University of Connecticut. Storrs, CT, U. S. A.
Email: Russell.farnen@uconn.edu.

This slender and well-written book addresses the critical question: does education contribute to democratization and poverty reduction in developing countries? Rather than concentrating on the role of education in social and economic development, it instead zeros in on education's critical place in political development, including its positive and negative effects on advancing and hindering democratization and development. A key theme is the type and kind of education, as it both supports and hinders democratic principles, which leads to successes and failures in many developing countries, with a specific and detailed case study of South Africa where successes outweigh any failures for democratic change.

The two authors are experienced researchers and experts on the topic under consideration; having worked together and separately on democracy and development cross nationally, especially in South Africa. As they point out in the Preface to their book, if one compares a map of the world 30 years ago, much of Africa, South America, Asia and the Middle East would be labeled authoritarian as compared with today where most of these same areas (except for the Levant) are now sprinkled with democracies, including the post-Arab Spring countries which are still powering democratic reforms, as we speak today.

As an overview and summary of conclusions of this book, let us consider its main points. Chapter 1 links democracy and development including items such as key elements of democracy, development, and education. Here are mentioned different developmental models in place which incorporate bureaucratic procedures for the masses, stereotyping of North/South countries, competing definitions of democracy and the hidden curriculum, and incorporating democratic principles (such as participation, the vote and personal freedom). Democracy, therefore, may be considered along with social and economic growth to be a fundamental goal of developmental efforts.

In chapter 2 the relationship among education, democracy and political development is discussed from Aristotle's Politics and Plato's Republic to current models. School segregation by faith and ethnicity, elitism, use of schools for propaganda and indoctrination purposes, acceptance of one's so – called “betters”, and using schools as

instruments of social control worldwide to solidify classroom authoritarianism and curricular impositions to teaching open decision-making are other examples of the misuse of democratic and humanistic schooling. Schools should be for more than the reproduction of social inequality. Democratization of schooling requires the reformulation of the deposit banking model of education where the teacher (subject) knows all and the students (objects) have nothing to contribute. One problem which still exists is that liberal democracy often brings with it free market capitalism without social democratic economic reforms. Democrats need to use Germany, Sweden or the Netherlands as societal models for social and economic democracy since these countries are useful models for toleration, respect and peace. Educational effects are ambiguous and cannot be clearly identified as the key element in development, but there is a growing worldwide faith that this linkage exists. Education can also be linked to the growth of democracy, and one without the other means that one or both will fail.

Chapter 3 asks about education for democracy, such as civic education, teacher professionalism and pupil participation. Models for democratic schooling (including shared decision making, shared rule making, trust and mutual respect) are exemplified with four different case studies from Ecuador, India, UNICEF- Africa, and Bolivia (specific examples from other countries abound). Democratic schools are based on principles, shared power over rule making and school councils, which make important decisions. Democracy infuses the curriculum and the classrooms and students feel part of a democratic family. Rote learning plays no role in such an active environment of constructivist pedagogy, which is child centered, interactive, and pragmatic. Teachers need to be exposed to new features of democratic education both before and during in service training and education. The goal of cultivating the most professional teachers is to create those who have attributes such as autonomy, independence, collaborative, trusting, adaptive, flexible and accepting of intrinsic rewards. Authoritarian educational practices are so entrenched in developing school systems that it may be easier and more effective to purchase new textbooks written under progressive auspices than to go off on a reform binge to change the whole school top to bottom. It may be that the culture and ethos of a locality may present a very high barrier to the introduction of democratic schooling. An interesting list of more than 20 key features of democratic education tenets in Namibia (such as participative education, problem-solving, encouraging the joy of teaching/learning, and dynamic evaluation techniques, to name but a few), are discussed within the context of competing cultural dynamics, a never ending process of change. Democratic citizen education, which is consistently at war with authoritarianism and fascism, plays an important role in developing democracy, as do new techniques of evaluation and school assessment/inspection. The close links between democratic principles and practices (e.g., equality and equal pay for equal work, participation and group work, or human rights and the absence of corporal punishment) are also part of this broad movement toward democratic reforms, including action research and critical reflection, now underway in the developing world.

Chapter 4 deals with obstacles to greater democracy in education. The subtopics refer to the bureaucratic and authoritarian legacy in schools, undemocratic school organization, ethos and culture, a tradition of harsh punishment, rigid teaching methods and one way evaluation techniques (regurgitation!) and authority based teacher education (the teacher

is always right). Numerous examples of anti-democratic education in China, Malaysia, Pakistan, Iran, Uganda, Zambia, Bolivia, Laos, Cambodia and Africa generally, are cited as case studies of undemocratic practices and systems in opposition to, rather than in favor of, democracy in the classroom. Different plans such as the colonial model help to explain the lasting bureaucratic/authoritarian patterns of school organization still in vogue in post-colonial states in Africa, Asia and South America. Another model the authors use to explain schooling in developing countries is called the prismatic model or theory. This refers to the inherent contradictions within these societies whereby all seems to be running smoothly on the surface but different strains of violence are at work in the social underground. Examples of such incidents occurring simultaneously in the schools are sexual violence, pay disputes, teacher lethargy, assaults on school personnel, bribery, and other criminal activity. As the light of truth shines through a prism and fragments, its rays disperse into different colors symbolizing traditional and modern waves/bundles of colored particles, which correspond to modern or traditional values such as bureaucracy versus witchcraft. The authors conclude that school bureaucracy rather than democratic decision making is the single largest contribution developing schools are presently making to the educational effort but democratic schooling is still a far reach for them at this time.

The authors next turn to a case study of post apartheid South Africa after 1996 in chapter 5 and to how that new country is contributing to what we know about educational, political and economic growth developing hand in hand there (RSA ranks 123 out of 187 countries in 2011 on the UNO human developmental index applied in a worldwide context). In RSA education is regarded as a form of social capital where meritocracy can help achieve more equality, competition and entrepreneurial capacities, harnessing education as an impetus or model for modernization, including furtherance of peace and human rights. The new RSA educational system aims to promote active learners, critical thinkers, and independent/free students willing and able to play cooperative roles in educational reform, decision-making, and school reorganization. In this chapter the authors raise several basic questions or dilemmas between modernization versus traditional school organization and choosing between peace and democracy versus authoritarianism and violence as addressed in the 1996 RSA Constitution. These themes are further subdivided into more than ten basic values such as respect for the reconciliation process, etc. The RSA also instituted a goal-centered curriculum focusing on democratic citizenship, student freedom, and social responsibility. A new curriculum statement incorporates other principles such as new assessment techniques and respect for student involvement in the process. Student governing bodies were required to adopt democratic processes and procedures, such as stakeholder participation in rule making in a code of conduct operating on the premise that democracy can produce the highest quality education. Despite these changes described and proposed above, RSA education is still violent, abusive, undemocratic, racist, and antithetical to open schooling, unequal and authoritarian.

Chapter 6 on democratic educational change and conclusions says that despite these many shortcomings there is still much evidence of new trends and programs which stress child centrism, active learning, and non-traditional education, which is still much in force today in RSA. Descriptors of traditional education include words such as

authoritarianism, text/lecture based, passive, imitative, transmission belt models, teacher dominated, encouraging resistance and lacking agency. One of the few workable models for educational reform in these areas, which has proven to work as promised, is democratic human rights education. Teachers and NGO representatives need to stay in close touch in joint programs, teachers need to work for equality and to stop abuse and sexual predators. In school, home and community, for example, reforms require high level policy statements which legitimize change, plans for elimination of all forms of violence in schools, imposition of teacher professionalism so that staff arrive on time, teach and assess fairly, and to implement a measure of “bureaucratic rationality” to implement some of the reform models described in Chapter 3 of the book. Schools can be reformed and reconstructed if there is the will, determination, and skill to do so. Reformers, teachers, and politicians can form alliances to adopt action research, critical reflection, and other basic reforms to change education practices.

As I come to my concluding remarks a couple of other observations seem to be appropriate. One inescapable observation is that there is a long way to go in RSA and other developing countries toward reaching a democratic system of schooling, as well as important democratic social, political economic and cultural features. The resources assembled for this book make clear that relevant trends seem to be heading in the right direction. However, the evidence presented from RSA and other case studies seems to fall short of where we would hope many developing countries would be after so many years of independence, de-colonization and even relative peace. The evidence backing optimism about these states is far less strong than is the pessimism engendered by the democratic development story told, even if done so in a refreshing way. For this shortcoming, the authors and their references cannot be criticized or faulted. They have simply taken us through this evidentiary route and the result has been disappointing because a truthful but still unfortunate picture emerges at the end of the tale. I believe we must wait a few more years for a rosier portrait to emerge and sufficient new findings and reports that will paint a new cultural landscape with many more pleasant dimensions. This is unlikely to happen in the near future since developing countries are themselves responsible for these momentous results. We can only write good books, help when asked and wish our colleagues good luck in their future endeavors.

In the 1930s in the USA, John Dewey recognized the key role that education played in creating democratic societies. So it is appropriate that this interesting and scholarly book ends with an appropriate quotation from him. It is also appropriate to note that eighteen pages (more than 10 %) of the book are devoted to references including selections from both authors so one can get a sense of their other scholarly works, which helps to provide context for this study itself. The list of references is also helpful for readers who want additional source material, especially from the UNO and RSA archives. This source material both undergirds and expands the utility of this excellent and recent book.